

## My Birth Preferences

**Birth Plan vs Birth Preferences:** You may be asked to fill out a **birth plan** by your doctor or midwife while pregnant, however not all hospitals and birthing centre's require this. The difference between a **birth plan** and **birth preferences** are that it will give options for whichever way the birth goes and remember this is not only for your doctor or midwife but it can also be a fantastic way to ensure that you and your partner are both absolutely clear about what you want to happen during your labour and delivery. Most women ask their partners (unless you have a doula) to be their advocate, which means that they will run interference with family, medical personnel and in any other area that you do not need to concern yourself with while you stay focused on the job at hand. If this is how you would like your experience to go then a birth preference list can help this happen.

Many people believe that writing down their birth preferences is a waste of time as there is no way to **plan** for your child's birth or know how it is going to go. But a birth preference list can be just another step in your preparation for your new child.

### Before you start writing you will need to gather as much information as possible:

- Antenatal classes will be offered through your hospital or birthing centre and these are always highly recommended as they are a great source of information on what happens at that specific hospital/centre.
- Talk to your partner about what sort of labour and birth they would like you to have, you may find that they are strong advocates for a drug free birth but at the same time do not want to see you in pain and that may be their biggest fear. How does your birth partner see their role, what sort of support do they think that they can provide to you?
- When reading your pregnancy book/s or magazines jot down anything that you think may work well for you during your labour and keep the notes together ready for when you write your plan.
- Talk to friends/family that have given birth at the same centre/hospital as you. What can they recommend to you after their own experiences (for your own sanity ensure that you are not made to listen to horror story after horror story, this will not do you any good, just remember the millions of untold stories that are extremely positive!)
- Do you intend to share this plan with your doctor or midwife if it is not requested, or will your partner ensure your preferences are catered to? Sharing it with your doctor/midwife ensures that your wishes are clear and shows that you are informed about your choices. However, I'm sure you agree that your doctor/midwife has more important things to do then sit and read your BIRTH PLAN ESSAY so keep it short and to the point.
- Remember that not all births go according to plan so make sure you plan for or at least are aware of every eventuality. Using words like 'I would prefer' or 'if possible' as I makes your preferences more flexible.

### Things to include in your Birth Preferences:

- Place of birth
- Your support team both in and out of the birthing suite
- Setting the scene (music helps to release endorphins, these hormones act as a natural pain relief during labour so preparing a play list of your favourite music can't hurt)
- Preferred clothing
- How you would like to manage your labour and birth
  - Bath or shower
  - Food and drink
  - Positions for labour (active birth)
  - Positions for birth
  - Pain relief (if wanted and in what order)
  - Emergency interventions
  - Episiotomy
  - Internal Examinations (your doctor or midwife may have set procedures so be sure to discuss your preferences with them)
  - Monitoring your baby's heart rate
- Immediate contact after birth (skin to skin, privacy)
- Cutting of the cord
- First breastfeed (spontaneous or directed)
- Delivery of placenta (natural or with medical intervention (syntocin))
- Medical procedures (can these wait? Weighing, screening test, vitamin K injection)
- Unexpected situations (SCBU, who will stay with the baby)
- Special needs (In the interest of providing all information do you have any special needs that may need to be catered for?)

### Who should have copies of your Birth Preference List?

- Your support team
- The ideal time to present your birth plan to your health carer is around 32 – 36 weeks, this will ensure you have had time to fully research and process your own thoughts and feelings about the birth and be ready to discuss and if need be defend your own personal choices
- Birth Preference lists are usually well accepted though you may have to negotiate some points. It is understandable that some health carers may feel like they are being told how to do their job and may react not so positively. Be open and acknowledge any concerns they may have and ensure you have appropriate reasons for all of your choices. Maintain eye contact and be assertive not aggressive about your choices.

Remember that at the end of the day the health professionals are there to protect you and your unborn child, keep the lines of communication open and ensure you are both on the same page, your birth partner being well informed will also be able to ensure all of your preferences are being adhered to as much as possible while you focus on the important job at hand.